**Readers’ Notes**

*The Great Commission* by He Qi (pronounced Huh Chee), is inspired by [Matthew 28:16–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28%3A16-20&version=ESV), in which Jesus gives his disciples their most important task, just before his Ascension.

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.****17****When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.****18****And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.****19****Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,****20****and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Jesus invites the 11 disciples to Galilee since this is where he began his ministry. It is quite understandable that some of them are hesitant to believe that Jesus could return after his death, and to be shaken by Jesus’ clear authority in his request to them. There is a sense of urgency in this encounter - you can feel the adrenalin. But Jesus shows complete confidence in the disciples in their tasks ahead. Our artist uses bold colours here to reflect this energy and confidence. This has adrenalin and passion. The call is magnetic.

The Christian is modelled on Christ because we go out in the name of Christ. The minister is ‘in persona Christi’ or in the ‘form of Christ’. So here, Christ is reflected in the figures in green. His long arm that stretches forth is the physical image of the commission to go out, to go far and wide in the name of God. While in the other hand, Jesus’ staff symbolises his shepherd role and roots the disciples in their faith; as well as enabling the picture to balance the present with the future in this interplay of diagonals.

The disciple holding the anointing oil is baptising the woman kneeling in red while their bodies weave in-between a boat. And is this St Peter’s ship steering the church to heavenly salvation? Peter was a fisherman by trade – so notice the fish around the boat, creating movement and depth in the painting. Now, symbolically, as a ‘fisher of men’, Peter would be bringing many followers safely back to shore.

The disciple with the orange candle symbolises the light of faith in the world. From the candle we light at baptism, taken from the Paschal candle in our churches, this new light represents the faith bearer shining against the dark. Like a baton that is passed on, this candle of truth will travel through time and space. All who hold it feel the flame’s warmth for the cold days of doubt are truly over.

Watch the Holy Spirit swoop down and hover. See how it rests briefly on Jesus’ arm.

*‘for the Spirit of the Lord is upon me’* – says Christ in Luke 4:18 and in Isaiah 61:1.

Around the baptised, a white dove circles, before heading off to Pentecost - igniting the world from above. And who are these 3 people dressed in blue? Are they witnesses to this new Commission or disciples on their way? Is the Spirit leading them to faith?

This painting invites us to follow the journey that started from the darkened cities seen in the background, to the heavenly walls of Jerusalem, here, in the foreground – it says to us *Thy kingdom come* down to earth, ahead and beyond. And we are invited to follow their way as they reach the light. The light to enlighten all nations until the end of time.

This contemporary artist is a professor of philosophy at China’s Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, and one of his nation’s most acclaimed Christian artists. One of He Qi’s passions is to encourage the creation of modern Chinese Christian art to help change the image that Christianity has in China. He says that, "Many people in China and around the world equate Christian art with European Art”. As Western religious imagery is but one lens and interpretation of our shared and global faith, this painting helps us to remember the Commission by Jesus was to the ends of *all* the earth.

He Qi uses not only Cubist and modernist styles in his vibrant colours, but unmistakable Chinese techniques and design elements, in depicting many Biblical scenes. Here we see not just cubist shapes working together, but facial features and postures that evoke traditional devotional art with brushstrokes that draw on some Chinese pottery styles, from woodcuts and embroidery.

In much the same way that European Renaissance painters portray Jesus or Moses in clothing that was contemporary to the painter’s time, He Qi depicts key Bible characters as imposing figures in the robes and makeup of classical Chinese opera.
He Qi feels that such cultural nods help Chinese people to relate more to the Biblical events and their associated faith.

Christian art in China can be dated back to the Nestorian movement beginning in 635 C.E. with later revivals during the Ming and Qing (pronounced Ching) Dynasties. Then, too, the Biblical figures depicted, resembled everyday Chinese more than the European look most familiar in Western art. After the 19th-century Opium Wars, and again following the return of Christian churches to China in the 1980s, missionaries also took pains to fuse Chinese culture with Christian imagery and ideas.

He Qi’s work is a contemporary extension of that kind of cultural outreach, and has made him one of China’s most sought-after Christian artists.